



Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying and Online Cruelty

Essential Question

What factors intensify cyberbullying and online cruelty, and what can you do to lessen them?

Lesson Overview

Students learn that cruelty can escalate quickly online because people are often anonymous and posts spread quickly. They view the video, “**Ricardo’s Story – Making Fun of Others Online**,” and identify the factors that contribute to online cruelty. Students then watch the video, “**Stacey’s Story – When Rumors Escalate**,” identify the roles of various players in the video, and describe what upstanders can do to lessen the effects of this online cruelty. Students then create diagrams on their **Dial It Down Student Handout** to show how online cruelty can either escalate or de-escalate.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to ...

- reflect on the factors that intensify online cruelty and cyberbullying.
- identify what targets and upstanders can do when online cruelty occurs.
- recognize their own role in escalating or de-escalating online cruelty.

Materials and Preparation

- Preview the videos, “**Ricardo’s Story – Making Fun of Others Online**” and “**Stacey’s Story – When Rumors Escalate**,” and prepare to show them to students.
- Copy the **Dial It Down Student Handout**, one for each student.
- Review the **Dial It Down Student Handout – Teacher Version**.

Family Resources

- Send home the **Cyberbullying Family Tip Sheet (Middle & High School)**.

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Standards Alignment –

Common Core:

grades 9-10: RI.1, RI.2, RI.3, RI.4, RI.8, RI.10, W.2a, W.2b, W.2c, W.2d, W.2e, W.2f, W.4, W.5, W.6, W.7, W.8, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.3, SL.5, L.4a, L.6

grades 11-12: RL.1, RL.2, RL.4, RL.7, RL.8, RL.10, RI.1, RI.2, RI.4, RI.10, W.2a, W.2b, W.2c, W.2d, W.2e, W.2f, W.4, W.5, W.6, W.7, W.8, W.9, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.2, SL.3, SL.5, L.4a, L.6

NETS-S: 1a, 1d, 2a, 2d, 3b, 3d, 4a, 4b, 4d, 5a, 5b

Key Vocabulary –

target: a person who is the object of an intentional action

offender: a person who has malicious intent to hurt or damage someone

bystander: a person who does nothing when they witness something happening

upstander: a person who supports and stands up for someone else

escalate: to increase or make more intense

de-escalate: to decrease or make less intense

introduction

Warm-up (5 minutes)

EXPLAIN to students that online cruelty, also referred to as cyberbullying, takes place whenever someone uses digital media tools such as the Internet and cell phones to deliberately upset or harass someone else, often repeatedly.

▶ SHOW students the video, “**Ricardo’s Story – Making Fun of Others Online.**”

ASK:

*Do you think Ricardo is a cyberbully?
Why or why not?*

Guide students to recognize that Ricardo probably is a cyberbully because he openly criticizes people online. On the other hand, we do not know how mean his comments were, and if he might change his behavior in the future.

What does Ricardo mean when he says that information “gets around really quick”?

Guide students to think about how information generally travels faster and reaches more people on the Internet than offline, and that this fact potentially makes the impact harsher.

Ricardo thinks that harassing others on Internet, rather than in person, appeals to some teenagers because they can’t be attacked back physically. What do you think?

Guide students to think about how people may cyberbully online because they do not have to face their target and can “hide” behind their computers. On the other hand, conflicts that start online often go offline at some point.

*Have you ever encountered online cruelty?
How do you think someone might feel after being the target of it?*

Sample responses:

- Upset
- Alone
- Trapped
- Hurt
- Angry

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary words **target** and **offender**.

DISCUSS with students how the targets of online cruelty may feel they can be bombarded with negative comments at any time, anywhere. And when more offenders join in the online cruelty, the situation gets even worse.

teach 1

Watch Stacey’s Story (15 minutes)

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary terms **escalate**, **de-escalate**, **bystander**, and **upstander**.

▶ SHOW the video, “**Stacey’s Story – When Rumors Escalate,**” and answer the following questions about online cruelty as a class.

ASK:

Who was involved in the story and what roles did they play? Who was the target? Who were the offenders? Were there bystanders and/or upstanders?

Sample responses:

- **Target:** Stacey, whose intentions are misunderstood and who feels beaten down by being picked on offline and online
- **Offenders:** The girl who misunderstood Stacey’s intent, as well as her friends who led the cruel online behavior
- **Bystanders:** All of the people who might have stepped in but did not, including Stacey’s cousin and others at school or online
- **Upstander:** Stacey’s mom, who empathized with Stacey and encouraged her to seek help from the school

How do you think the online cruelty might be different from offline behavior?

As Stacey says, most of the comments were made anonymously and from “miles away.” Students should recognize that it may be easier for offenders to be cruel when they are not face to face with their target. Students should also understand that it is easy for online cruelty to spread quickly, both because of the technology and because of the herd mentality.

What do you think you might have done if you were Stacey? What could you have done if you wanted to be an upstander in this situation?

Invite student responses, and then guide students through the chart that follows.

DISCUSS the following ways that targets and upstanders can help de-escalate online cruelty.

How Targets and Upstanders Can De-escalate Online Cruelty

TARGETS	UPSTANDERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ignore and block the bully. Offenders often want attention. Take it away and they may give up.• Save the evidence. You may need it later for documentation.• Change your privacy settings. Allow only people you trust to see or comment on your pages.• Tell trusted friends and adults. Create a support network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stand up to the offender when appropriate. If you see something negative, say something. Make it clear that you think online cruelty is wrong, and tell the offender to back off. (It may be easier to do this if you have good standing with the offender.)• Point out the bully’s motivation to the target. Comfort the target by explaining that many offenders act cruelly just to gain control, power, or status.• Help the target advocate. Help the target find friends and school leaders who can help de-escalate the situation. It’s easier to stand up to cruelty when you are not alone.

ASK:

Have you or a friend ever experienced a situation similar to Stacey's? How might the strategies in the chart have helped you in that situation?

Have students apply what they have learned to personal experiences, without using real names.

What prevent a bystander from taking action? What advice would you give someone to convince them to be upstanding?

Bystanders may hesitate to get involved in a cyberbullying situation because they don't want to become targets themselves. Encourage students to put themselves in a target's shoes. What would it feel like if nobody wanted to help them out when they needed it most? Remind students that they can show support in many ways, even simply by listening to a target about his or her experience.

teach 2

Create “Dial It Down” Maps (20 minutes)

EXPLAIN to students that they are going to map out two stories. One will show how online cruelty escalated in “Stacey’s Story.” The other will show how it might have de-escalated if Stacey had some upstanders on her side.

Note: You may choose to have students create their maps based on other stories about cyberbullying and online cruelty, rather than on Stacey’s Story. You can have students research news stories on their own, or you can assign stories from this set of scenarios, created by the Cyberbullying Resource Center (www.cyberbullying.us/Cyberbullying_Scenarios.pdf).

DISTRIBUTE the **Dial It Down Student Handout**, one for each student.

ARRANGE students in pairs. Have one student complete the left-hand column of the handout for Stacey’s Story to show how the situation escalated. Have the other one fill in the Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying version of her story to show how the situation could have been de-escalated.

INSTRUCT students to turn their handouts into maps, using elements such as size and color to indicate escalation and de-escalation, and arrows to show the flow of events.

INVITE students to compare their results with their partners. Then have volunteers share their maps with the class.

closing

Wrap-up (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students’ understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

ASK:

What are some roles that different people play in cyberbullying situations, and how would you describe each one?

Sample responses:

- Target: The object of the online cruelty
- Offender: The person who tries to hurt or harass the target
- Bystander: A person who does nothing when they see something happening
- Upstander: A person who supports and stands up for someone else

What are some ways that online cruelty and cyberbullying can escalate, or intensify?

Sample responses:

- When multiple people become involved in the cruelty or bullying
- When the online cruelty becomes public, through posts, tagging, and comments.
- When people start sending threats

Why is it important to be an upstander rather than a bystander?

Students should understand that bystanders are effectively allowing the target to be hurt and degraded by others; upstanders take whatever action they can to stop this unacceptable behavior.

Extension Activity

Explain to students that online cruelty has, in a few cases, led to teen suicides, attempted suicides, or teens stating that they want to take their lives. But make sure students know this is not the norm. Then show students one of the following videos: two are about a teen who took his or her own life after becoming the target of online cruelty, and one is about a teen who makes a plea to the bullies. Have students break into small groups and record their ideas about what factors escalated the cruelty to such a serious level, and what might have de-escalated it. Invite students to share their findings with the class. Then discuss as a class what steps they should take if they believe a classmate is seriously distressed or depressed as a result of cyberbullying. Students should understand that in such situations, in addition to trying to de-escalate it, they need to tell trusted adults what is going on.

- ABC News, “Cruel Kids, Tragic Ends”
<http://abcnews.go.com/Primetime/video?id=2443795>
- CBS News, “Officials: Suicidal Teen Was Cyber-bullied”
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/01/27/earlyshow/leisure/gamesgadgets/gizmos/main6146385.shtml>
- The Westport Patch, “Westport Student Issues YouTube Plea to Bullies”
<http://westport.patch.com/articles/westport-student-issues-youtube-plea-to-bullies>

At-Home Activity

Have students review the school’s bullying policy. If your school does not have a policy, have students find a sample policy online. Instruct them to study the policy and determine if there are clear guidelines for identifying and dealing with online cruelty in the school. Encourage them to suggest things they would like to see added or changed. You may wish to share these suggestions with administrators.

Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying and Online Cruelty

Directions

Fill out the chart after watching the video, “**Stacey’s Story**.” One partner should complete the boxes on the left to show how the situation escalated. The other partner should complete the boxes on the right, which shows the initial incident, an escalating incident, and then two de-escalating incidents. Keep in mind that the incidents might not happen one after the other, even though they are shown this way.



After completing the chart, turn what you’ve written above into a diagram or map. Show how situations can escalate or de-escalate, using colors, shapes, and arrows.

Stacey’s Story	Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying
Initial incident (what happened first?):	Initial incident (what happened first?):
Escalating incident #1:	Escalating incident:
Escalating incident #2:	De-escalating incident #1:
Escalating incident #3:	De-escalating incident #2:

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Stacey’s Story	Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying
<p>Initial incident (what happened first?):</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p>Offender mistakenly thinks Stacey is trying to flirt with her boyfriend, who is actually Stacey’s cousin.</p> </div>	<p>Initial incident (what happened first?):</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p>Offender mistakenly thinks Stacey is trying to flirt with her boyfriend, who is actually Stacey’s cousin.</p> </div>
<p>Escalating incident #1:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p><i>The offender says, “Stay away from my boyfriend” and “Oh, you better watch out.”</i></p> </div>	<p>Escalating incident:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p><i>The offender’s friends post mean bulletin messages about Stacey.</i></p> </div>
<p>Escalating incident #2:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p><i>Friends of the offender post a threatening message saying they want to pick a fight with Stacey.</i></p> </div>	<p>De-escalating incident #1:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p><i>One of Stacey’s friends sees the exchange and privately messages the offender to clear up the misunderstanding and to urge the offender to back off.</i></p> </div>
<p>Escalating incident #3:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p><i>The online cruelty becomes public, through posts, tagging, and comments.</i></p> </div>	<p>De-escalating incident #2:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p><i>Stacey changes her privacy settings so only friends can send her messages or post on her profile.</i></p> </div>

After completing the chart, turn what you’ve written above into a diagram or map. Show how situations can escalate or de-escalate, using colors, shapes, and arrows. (Students should create maps or flow charts that clearly show movement from one incident to the next. They may show one incident breaking off into many, or they may use color or size to indicate an intensifying or waning situation.)

Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying and Online Cruelty

1. Reflect on each of these statements about the Internet. Circle three statements that support the idea that the Internet makes bullying easier and a bigger problem.

- a) Information can spread very quickly on the Internet.
- b) If you say something mean online, you don't have to worry about getting in a physical fight.
- c) You can find lots of information on the Internet.
- d) Anything someone says could stay on the Internet for a long time.
- e) You can get support from groups on the Internet
- f) Parents, teachers, and students all use the Internet.

2. Mei keeps getting mean comments on her Twitter posts. Cara, Mei's good friend, has seen the comments and wants to help. What can both girls do to make the situation better?

- a) Mei could delete her Twitter account. Cara could let Mei use her Twitter account so that Mei can still post, but no one knows it's her.
- b) Mei could ignore and block the bully. Cara could comfort Mei.
- c) Mei could tell the bully to back off, and Cara could post mean things about the bully on Twitter.
- d) Mei could tell the bully to back off, and Cara could get a group of friends to post embarrassing photos of the bully.

3. A(n) _____ helps to de-escalate, or lessen the impact of online cruelty by supporting and standing up for the person who is bullied.

- a) bystander
- b) upstander
- c) target
- d) offender

Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying and Online Cruelty

ASSESSMENT
TEACHER VERSION

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- d) Anything someone says could stay on the Internet for a long time.
- e) You can get support from groups on the Internet
- f) Parents, teachers, and students all use the Internet.

Answer feedback

The correct answers are **a**, **b**, and **d**. Bullying and online cruelty can be intensified online because information on the Internet can be anonymous, public, and can last a long time.

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- a) Mei could delete her Twitter account. Cara could let Mei use her Twitter account so that Mei can still post, but no one knows it's her.
- b) Mei could ignore and block the bully. Cara could comfort Mei.**
- c) Mei could tell the bully to back off, and Cara could post mean things about the bully on Twitter.
- d) Mei could tell the bully to back off, and Cara could get a group of friends to post embarrassing photos of the bully.

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b**. Oftentimes bullies want attention, so it's best to ignore them. The best thing for Mei to do is to block and ignore the bully, and the best thing for Cara to do is to offer support and comfort to her friend.

Turn Down the Dial on Cyberbullying and Online Cruelty

ASSESSMENT
TEACHER VERSION

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- c) target
- d) offender

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b**. An upstander does something to help or support the target of bullying.